

## HELPING YOUR CHILD THROUGH SEPARATION ANXIETY

It is normal for children to show distress, anger, and sadness when separated from their primary caregiver within the early childhood years (0 – 5 years). In fact, the emergence of separation anxiety often emerges around the child's first birthday. Although this is a normal difficulty that many children experience, it is none the less unsettling for all parties involved – the child, the parent, and other caregiver/adults. In fact, many parents experience extremely difficult emotions similar to their child's distress when separating. However it is important to manage this distress effectively to allow your child to make gains in the areas of independence and trust.

### TIPS TO TRY TO HELP YOUR CHILD DEAL WITH SEPARATION ANXIETY AT DANCE CLASS:

1. Talk with the teacher and develop a plan that will increase your confidence and ease your child's difficulty with saying goodbye. Reward your child for brave and independent behavior.
2. Be aware of the timing of good byes. Children are more likely to display unsettling reactions such as tantrums, yelling, crying, and screaming when they are tired, hungry, or restless. Schedule your dance class around their regular meal, snack, and nap times.
3. When saying goodbye to your little one, remember to be calm and consistent. Remember if you show distress, he or she will likely increase in their discomfort. One way to improve your consistency is to create a good bye ritual, consisting of a pleasant yet firm goodbye. Let them know where you will be while they are in class and where you will be when they are done with class. Once you say goodbye it is time to leave. If you linger or come back to check you will create more distress on your child, as they will be more uncertain about your separation
  - a. We have a good bye chair set up by the door for parents whose children are struggling with separation anxiety so that they know where to look for them. Parents should give a firm good bye and let the child know they will be waiting for them after class in the good bye chair. Parents should then go sit in the good bye chair as the child enters the classroom. The parent should be sitting in the good bye chair when class is over so the child knows right where to find them.
  - b. Children will stay in class for 5 minutes. If they are still upset they will be brought back out to the parents after 5 minutes. After 5 minutes the teacher will come back out to check if the dancer is ready to join the class. Parents should not knock or open the door or come into the classroom to check on the child or to send them back to class.
  - c. Parents whose child is struggling with separation anxiety should not leave the studio during class time and should make sure that they are sitting in the good bye chair when the child comes out of class.
4. When it comes time to say goodbye, connect with the teacher or assistant. It may be best for the teacher or assistant to make physical contact, such as holding your child in their arms or holding hands with your child. Reassure your child that the teacher will take good care of them while you are gone.
5. Be sure to return when you say you are going to return and do not be late.
6. Work with your child's teacher on a Bravery Home note for positive reward of brave behavior.